



The Alabama Veteran

"Proudly Serving America's Finest"

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IMPORTANT DATES

- May 11th - Mother's Day
- May 17th - Armed Forces Day
- May 26th - Memorial Day
- June 14th - Flag Day
- June 15th - Father's Day
- July 4th - Independence Day
- July 18th - SBVA Meeting

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Honoring America's Fallen

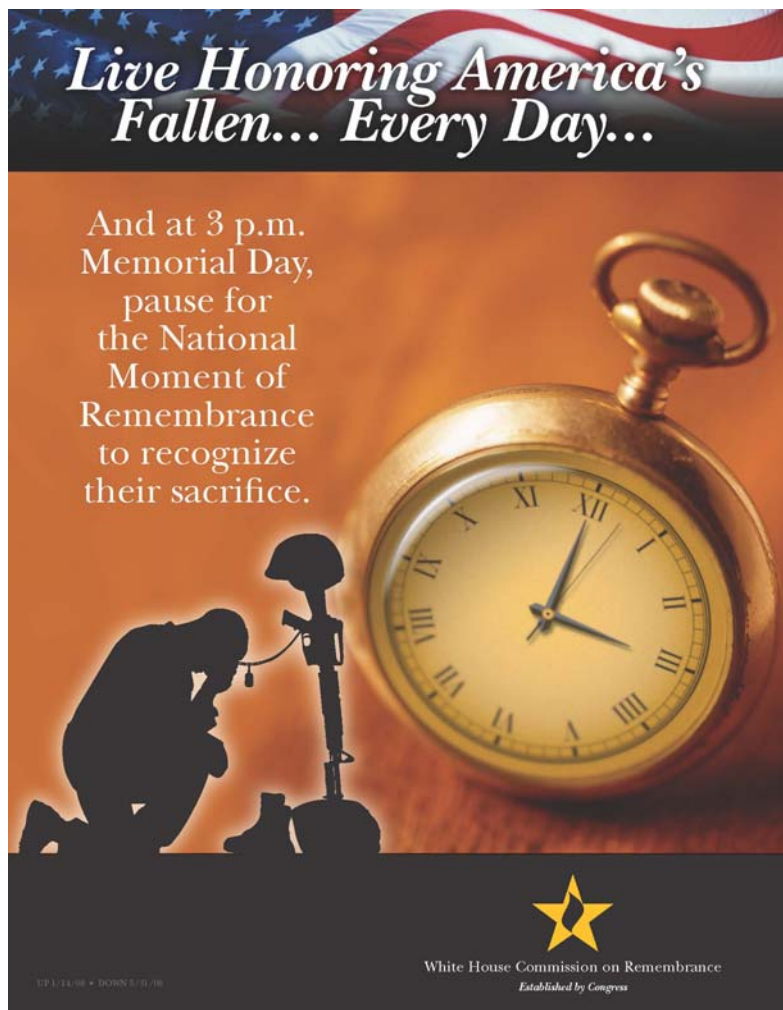
On Monday, May 26, 2008, Americans will have the opportunity to pause for a moment of remembrance on Memorial Day to recognize the sacrifice of America's fallen. On this solemn occasion, our nation will honor the lives of the brave men and women who have borne the burden of battle.

Since the terrorist attacks of September, 11, 2001, over 4,000 American service members have given their lives for freedom, and some 95 Alabamians have made the ultimate sacrifice while defending our homeland and fighting terrorism abroad.

These men and women bravely answered the call to duty when their country needed them the most, and gave their all so we can remain free.

From the American Revolution to the current War on Terror, those who have worn our nation's uniform in America's Armed Forces have proudly stood firm to defend and secure the basic principles of freedom we enjoy as Americans. We must not forget their courage, valor and devotion to duty. And as we honor them, we must also remember those they have left behind. As a grateful nation, we should honor their sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, husbands and wives, for they too have borne the scars of war.

On Memorial Day at 3:00 p.m., Americans everywhere are asked to take a moment to reflect on the lives of our fallen. As a free nation, it is important that we honor them and preserve their memory so current and future generations will never forget the purpose for their supreme sacrifice.





Commissioner's Corner

W. Clyde Marsh

It is an honor and privilege to continue to serve those who secured our nation's liberty.

In his address to West Point cadets on May 12, 1962, General Douglas MacArthur said that in war there is no substitute for victory. Those words hold true for veterans today. It is the veteran who understands that we must prevail against tyranny, oppression and terrorism if we are to remain strong, democratic and free. And it is the veteran who knows that freedom is won at all cost, which often includes making the ultimate sacrifice.

As the war on terror continues to surge in Iraq and Afghanistan, our veterans' ranks continue to grow, and they are more in need of our help than ever.

The job of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs is quantified in the words of Abraham Lincoln: "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan."

I am proud that our employees are veterans' advocates who are answering the call by providing the increased services, and access to information and benefits to Alabama veterans.

In April, the ADVA held a successful training

conference since realigning the department from six to three districts. The realignment did not affect the department's ability to come together as a unified team with a common purpose of receiving the latest information and instruction for improving veterans' benefits and services.

Additionally, the conference was an ideal forum to network, discuss issues, and articulate the agency's "way ahead." We had great participation from the VA Regional Office, the Social Security Administration, and the Governor's Operation Grateful Heart. I also want to commend the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and the Vietnam Veterans of America for contributing to the insightful and informative panel discussion.

I want to touch on a couple of issues relevant to our ability to fulfill our obligation to veterans, or to "be all that we can be," to coin a popular Army phrase.

The first issue is suicide, which the national rate has risen to crisis proportions. Unfortunately, veterans are no exception among suicide statistics. According to current VA reports, the

veterans' suicide rate has been consistently high since the turn of the twenty-first century.

I believe the key to stemming the tide of suicides is best achieved by helping veterans with medical illnesses, disabilities, and specifically treating veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as other forms of depression or despair.

Veterans must have access to treatment facilities and specialized care to help prevent, control, or eliminate this crisis. Awareness and the dissemination of information is just as important. Veterans must know and feel confident that help is available. We need to recognize the signs, gestures, or ideations of suicidal tendencies. Primary signs include: (1) Remarks to commit suicide. (2) Looking for ways to commit suicide. (3) Seeking access to pills, weapons or other destructive behavior. (4) Talking about death dying, or suicide. We need to be perceptive, ask questions, and refer veterans for help if in doubt. If you observe the signs, refer the veteran to the VA suicide prevention hotline at 1-800-273-(TALK) 8255, or to a VA center for treatment.

The final issue is the Alabama General Fund and Education Trust Fund Budgets. Both budgets have significant shortfalls in FY 2009, which will have some impact on ADVA operations. As a result of these shortfalls, state agencies expect a 10 to 12 percent reduction in FY 2009 spending authority. Likely impacts to the ADVA may include streamlining training, curtailing excess travel, and temporarily suspending the hiring of new employees. Necessary travel for operations and management will continue. I am confident the department will adapt to this austere budget cycle and will continue to provide quality care and services to our veterans.

In closing, I want to remind our VA employees that you are part of something larger than yourself. You are faithful servants to our nation's finest men and women. You provide a priceless service to them and to the State of Alabama. It is clear that veterans are the benefactors of your hard work, and I am proud of you for your accomplishments. Remember to stay focused on our mission, and to press on regardless.

Around the State

Dedication planned for Alabama's National Cemetery

Veterans Affairs officials met with local, county and state agencies at The American Village in Montevallo on April 10th to discuss the dedication plan for the Alabama National VA Cemetery.

The new national cemetery will be located in Montevallo, approximately five miles west of Interstate 65 and adjacent to The American Village.

Cemetery Director Quincy Whitehead said the dedication ceremony will possibly be held in early fall. VA expects to begin construction of the first phase of the cemetery this summer. In September 2007, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs awarded a \$1.3 million contract

to Civil Consultants Inc. of Birmingham to design the cemetery.

The cemetery will include an administrative and public information center, an electronic gravesite locator, a flag assembly area, a memorial walkway and two committal shelters for funeral services. When complete, the first phase will consist of approximately 45 acres, and facilities needed to provide burials for approximately 10 years. The first-phase interment areas will provide 9,100 full-casket gravesites, 3,100 in-ground cremation sites and some 2,700 columbarium niches for cremation remains.

John Rich with the VA National Cemetery Administration said the new cemetery is part of the largest cemetery expansion since the Civil War. Rich said VA operates 125 national cemeteries, which serve as the final resting place for 3.4 million Americans. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained by calling VA's toll free number at 1-800-827-1000, or by visiting the VA website at www.cem.va.gov. Information about the Alabama National VA Cemetery is available by calling the cemetery's toll-free number at 1-866-547-5078.

VA Clinic opens at Fort Rucker

Veterans living in Alabama's Wiregrass Region will now have access to the new VA Outpatient Clinic that opened at the Fort Rucker Lyster Army Health Clinic on March 21. The clinic will provide veterans with primary care.

"This simultaneous maintenance and expansion of services to veterans in the Wiregrass Region is a direct result of a concerted effort to identify and resolve veterans needs, while remaining responsible stewards of our nation's re-

sources," said Central Alabama Veterans Affairs System (CAVHCS) Director Robert Ratliff. "The level of teamwork, expertise, communication and willingness to overcome obstacles necessary to realize this expansion of services are a direct reflection of the can-do spirit that has served this nation so well."

Ratliff thanked Col. Michael Kaminski, Commanding Officer at Lyster Army Health Clinic, for his help in getting the VA Clinic opened at Fort Rucker. Col. Kaminski said the clinic will benefit a significant number of underserved Wiregrass veterans.



CAVHCS Director Robert Ratliff and Col. Michael Kaminski cut a cake at the opening of the Wiregrass Region VA Clinic.

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center will treat PTSD and TBI

At a recent meeting of the State Board of Veterans Affairs, Alan Tyler, director of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, announced that the VA center will start treating veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) beginning in May.

Tyler said blast injuries are the signature wound of the current war in Iraq and added that it's important to reach out to veterans who are having a hard time coping with these war-related injuries.

The VA clinic will treat a few patients with mild to moderate brain damage and PTSD in the beginning, but plans to accommodate more veterans in the future.

State veterans home gets new administrator

At an April meeting, the State Board of Veterans Affairs unanimously approved the appointment of Larry Weappa of Hortense, Ga., as the new administrator of the William F. Green Veterans Home in Bay Minette. He is employed by Health Management Resources, which is the home's healthcare provider.

Weappa served as chief operating officer at the U.S. Naval Home in Gulfport, MS, and is a retired Navy officer with over 20 years of experience in long-term healthcare.

Around the State

Blue Star Salute planned for Memorial Day

The annual Blue Star Salute to America's Military will be held at The American Village in Montevallo on Memorial Day, Monday, May 26, 2008.

The Blue Star Salute is a special day designed to allow public participation in a full day of activities centered on recognizing and honoring America's military, veterans and members of the Armed Forces who have died while defending freedom.

On April 17th at the State Capitol, Governor Bob Riley signed a proclamation declaring May 26, 2008, as Blue Star Salute Day. This year's event will include military static displays, a patriotic concert, a wreath-laying ceremony, reenactment of the raising of the U.S. Flag at Iwo Jima, and a special Gold Star Salute to Alabama's fallen heroes.

The American Village will open to the public beginning at 9:30 a.m. Admission to the Blue Star Salute is free to all veterans, or a \$5 donation from the general public.



National Society Sons of the American Revolution Color Guard participate in the Blue Star Salute held at The American Village.

For more information about the 2008 Blue Star Salute, the public can contact the Blue Star Salute Foundation, Inc. at (205) 672-2887, or visit www.bluestarsalute.org.

Forum provides information on veterans benefits and programs

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a Veterans Information Forum (VIF) at the State Capitol on Feb. 4 to present information on VA benefits and programs available to Alabama veterans.

State VA Commissioner Clyde Marsh joined other VA and service organization officials in the VIF that was opened to the public. During the forum, Commissioner

Marsh discussed the state VA's priorities for 2008. He outlined the state's VA plan to expand long-term healthcare for Alabama veterans by building a fourth state veterans home in Pell City, and he addressed the proposed legislation to extend college benefits from four to five standard academic years for children of disabled veterans, and from two to three academic years for their spouses.

Ricardo Randle, director of the U.S. VA Regional Office in Montgomery, gave an overview of the federal VA system and provided statistical data on the level of benefits administered to veterans in Alabama. Randle said the federal VA Regional Office processed 19,000 disability claims last year, and said 67,000 veterans in the state are receiving VA compensation and pensions. Randle added that the federal VA paid some \$862 million in benefits to Alabama veterans in 2007.

Dr. Robert Ratcliff, director of the Birmingham VA Medical Center, presented information on the VA's plan to build additional VA Outpatient Clinics in areas that have large veterans population with no convenient access to VA medical facilities. Ratcliff said it's important for VA to redirect veterans from cities to community based VA Clinics.

Noah Galloway, a spokesman for the Birmingham based Lakeshore Foundation, discussed the foundation's Lima Foxtrot program that helps severely disabled veterans regain their independence through sports and outdoor recreation. While on his second tour in Iraq, Galloway was severely wounded and lost an arm and a leg in an IED attack. Galloway spoke about the self-confidence and personal courage he has regained through the Lima Foxtrot program. More information on the Lima Foxtrot Program can be found on-line at www.lakeshore.org.



Veteran Noah Galloway shares information about the Lakeshore Foundation's Lima Foxtrot Program during the Veterans Information Forum.

Around the State

Alabama Veterans Homes focused on quality

New elevators, backup generators and modern laundry facilities are just a few examples of improvement projects at Alabama's three veterans homes.

The projects are all part of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) ongoing quality improvement initiative for maintaining the state's veterans homes to a standard of excellence.

The ADVA's initiative ensures Alabama veterans receive the best quality of care in a home that is equipped with the most modern amenities and state-of-the-art equipment.

In early Spring, the ADVA upgraded three elevators in the Bill Nichols Veterans Home in Alexander City that were installed when the home was built in 1989.



The William F. Green Home in Bay Minette is one of three state veterans homes in Alabama.

In May, ADVA will begin installing additional generators at each of the veterans homes, which will provide enough power to run the facilities indefinitely during long-term power outages.

Laundry facilities at the William F. Green Veterans Home in Bay Minette and the Tut Fann Veterans Home in Huntsville are undergoing renovation and equipment

upgrades to better serve the veterans.

The Alabama Veterans Home Committee is also reviewing the plan for the fourth veterans home that will be built in Pell City. The three-phase plan includes design, construction, certification and occupation. The design phase will start immediately. With approved federal funding, construction should begin in 2009 or 2010.

Federal VA officials recently surveyed all three homes and were complimentary of the care and services being provided to veterans.

Gene Murdock with the Veterans Health Administration addressed the surveys with the State Board of Veterans Affairs. "I can report to you today that the care the veterans in these homes are being provided is good, quality care," said Murdock.



Alabama Veterans Affairs Commissioner Clyde Marsh (left) and SBVA Vice Chairman Wayne Dial (right) present a Certificate of Appreciation to YC Parris for his service as Director of the Birmingham VA Medical Center. Parris retired Jan. 2 after serving as the center's director for 12 years. He is credited with overseeing a major modernization of the Birmingham VA Medical Center, establishing a network of outpatient clinics and computerizing medical records. He spent some 38 years with the federal Department of Veterans Affairs and plans to continue working as a healthcare consultant.

State VA Department recognizes service



Sonny Reagan is recognized for his service to the State VA Department at a recent state VA board meeting. Reagan served as the department's general council for three years. He is Chief of the Consumer Affairs Division in the Office of the Attorney General. He is also an officer in the Alabama Army National Guard and a combat veteran.



Commissioner Marsh and Kim Justice, ADVA Veterans Homes Coordinator, recognize Lavon Henley for his service as the state VA representative at the William F. Green Veterans Home in Bay Minette. Henley is returning back to retirement after serving at the home since 2006. He had more than 30 years of service in the healthcare profession before coming out of retirement to serve as the state VA representative at William F. Green. Henley said working with veterans was personally rewarding and he thanked the ADVA for the opportunity to serve them.

News to Use

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Scholarship offered to dependents of America's fallen and disabled veterans

Freedom Alliance, an educational and charitable foundation, has announced a scholarship fund for dependent children of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardsmen and Reservists who have sacrificed life or limb while serving in uniform.

The Freedom Alliance Scholarship Fund is not restricted to tuition. It can be used as the student and their school see fit, including covering cost for fees, books or room and board.

Scholarship applicants must be the dependent son or daughter of a current or former member of the U.S. Armed Forces who has been killed or permanently disabled (100% VA disability rating) as a result of an operational mission or training accident, or who is currently classified as a Prisoner of War (POW), or

Missing in Action (MIA). The dependent child must also be a high school senior, or graduate, and be registered as a full-time undergraduate student and under the age of 26.

Freedom Alliance said the mission of the Scholarship Fund is two-fold. First, and most importantly, it is a reminder to the recipient that their parents' service and sacrifice will never be forgotten by a grateful nation. Second, it helps offset the high cost of college education for the sons and daughters of America's military heroes.

Information about the Freedom Alliance Scholarship Fund can be found online at www.freedomalliance.org. The application deadline for the 2008-2009 academic year is July 18, 2008.

Veterans needing assisted care may be eligible for Aid and Attendance Pension

Veterans who are receiving care at an Alabama veterans home, at another assisted living facility, or who are permanently housebound may be eligible for the VA's Aid and Attendance (A&A) Pension.

This special pension provides benefits for veterans and surviving spouses who require the regular attendance of another person to assist them in life-care needs such as eating, bathing and dressing. The A&A pension can provide up to \$1,519 per month to a veteran, and \$947 to a surviving spouse.

A veteran or surviving spouse may be eligible for the A&A pension if their gross income is below the annual level set by Congress. For more information on the A&A pension, call (334) 242-5084, or visit <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/pension/vetpen.htm#7>.

News to Use

Compensation for Women Veterans

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has assigned Women Veterans Coordinators in all VA Regional Offices to assist women veterans with development of VA claims. These coordinators have been trained to assist in handling claims for gender-specific conditions and claims based on sexual trauma.

Regional office staffs make women who file claims based on sexual trauma fully aware that they can receive priority care for personal trauma counseling at a VA Medical Center even if they do not have a VA disability rating. For more information, women veterans can call the VA at 1-800-827-1000 to speak with a Women Veterans Coordinator.

VA programs and services for homeless veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has VA coordinators across the country to assist the needs of homeless veterans.

In Alabama, VA representatives can provide information on the programs and services for homeless veterans through the Veterans Health Administration.

VA Services include outreach, case management, referrals to benefits counselors, health care professionals, and housing assistance. Alabama has a VA Homeless Coordinator's office in Birmingham, Tuscaloosa and Tuskegee.

For more information on VA programs and services for homeless veterans, visit www.va.gov/homeless, or call 1-800-827-1000.

Vocational Rehabilitation offered to disabled veterans

Disabled veterans could be eligible to receive assistance through the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

The program helps disabled veterans obtain and retain lasting, suitable jobs, and provides seriously disabled veterans with a means for gaining their independence.

Some of the services offered through the Vocational Rehabilitation Program include: vocational and personal counseling; evaluation of abilities, skills and interests; financial aid; and medical and dental treatment if needed.

By law, VA can provide up to 48 months of services to qualified veterans. The VA services may also be extended to dependents of qualified veterans.

More information on the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program can be found at www.va.gov, or by calling a state VA office.

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National VA Update

VA initiative builds on long-standing support for disabled veterans

Washington - Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake announced the creation of a Veterans Employment Coordination Service to oversee the department's program to recruit new veterans into the VA workforce, especially recently disabled combat veterans.

"It is important VA continues to set the example to private and public employers," Peake said. "This program builds upon the Department's long tradition of service to veterans, particularly the disabled."

The new office will work with military transition programs, veterans service organizations and other VA programs to promote careers in the VA workforce. The program will also work with VA managers and human resource offices to ensure supervisors are aware of programs for hiring veterans.

Efforts to assist severely injured veterans have already begun with the Department's participation in local career fairs targeting veterans of the Global War on Terror.

In November 2007, VA announced plans to hire 10 full-time regional veterans employment coordinators who provide hands-on assistance to veterans interested in careers at the Department. The new office will oversee the regional coordinators.

About 31 percent of VA's 260,000 employees are veterans, and nearly 8 percent are service-connected disabled veterans. VA ranks first among non-Defense agencies in the hiring of disabled veterans and is second only to the Department of Defense in the overall number of veterans on the workforce. Last fiscal year, VA hired more than 9,000 veterans.

VA reaches out to OEF and OIF Veterans

On May 1, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will begin contacting nearly 570,000 recent combat veterans to ensure they know about VA's medical services and other benefits.

"We will reach out and touch every veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom to let them know we are here for them," said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

A contractor-operated "Combat Veteran Call Center" will telephone two distinct populations of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the first phase, calls will go to an estimated 17,000 veterans who were sick or injured while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. VA will offer to appoint a care manager to work with them if they don't have one already. In the second phase, the VA will target another 550,000 OIF-OEF veterans who have been discharged from active duty.



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